

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Webcast

“Introduction: Identifying, Recognizing, and Learning From Effective Schools”

October 14, 2004

Ray Simon

Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education

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Hi, I'm Ray Simon, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the United States Department of Education. Thanks for joining us today to hear about how we should be identifying, recognizing, and learning from those Title I schools that have figured out how to reach all students. Title I, Part A requires states to recognize schools that have significantly closed the achievement gap and exceeded their Adequate Yearly Progress targets. By the end of this discussion, we hope to have helped you think about how to develop and improve the academic achievement awards and distinguished schools programs in your states.

Britt Jung, from the Instructional Change Group will moderate this discussion. We're grateful to have three very experienced educators join us from the field as well. Many of you know Joseph Johnson who has joined us from the Ohio Department of Education. From the Virginia Department of Education, we have Linda Wallinger. And from a local school district in Aldine, Texas, Wanda Bamberg has also joined us. So, enjoy the discussion, and thanks for all the hard work you do every day.

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Britt Jung

U.S. Department of Education, Title I Program Office

Dr. Joseph Johnson

Special Assistant to the State Superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education

Dr. Linda Wallinger

Assistant Superintendent of Instruction,
Virginia Department of Education

Dr. Wanda Bamberg

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction,
Aldine Independent School District

Britt Jung, Moderator, U.S. Department of Education, Title I Program Office:

Hi. My name is Britt Jung from the U.S. Department of Education and I work in the Instructional Change Group, **within SASA**, also known as The Title I Program Office. The purpose of this webcast is to talk about how states and districts can identify, recognize, and then learn from successful schools, particularly successful high poverty schools.

As we know, but it bears repeating, Title I's most broad purpose is to support school improvement efforts for those kids whom we've most often neglected to serve well and thus close the achievement the gap. Title I, Part A requires states to recognize schools that have succeeded in closing the gap and also exceeded their AYP targets, Adequate Yearly Progress targets.

I hope that by the end of this webcast, you'll have been able to think, and been prompted to think, about how states can create and improve academic achievement rewards

programs and distinguished schools programs. We have here today three very distinguished educators from throughout the country.

First off is Dr. Joseph Johnson. Many of you know him as the former Director of the Title I Program Office. He's currently, and for the last two years, been a Special Assistant to the State Superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education, and we are very privileged that he agreed to come back and talk with us here today.

Also from the Virginia Department of Education, Dr. Linda Wallinger has joined us, and she is the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in the Virginia DOE (Department of Education), and we welcome her as well. And from the local school district level, Dr. Wanda Bamberg, has joined us. She is the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in the Aldine Independent School District, and Aldine is located just outside of Houston, Texas. So I want to welcome all of you and thank you for agreeing to get on trains and planes to get here today.

Now I'm happy to turn the floor over to Joe Johnson, and he's going to set the stage for us a little bit and talk about why recognizing effective schools is so important. Joe...

Dr. Joseph JOHNSON, Special Assistant to the State Superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education:

I think it's very important for several reasons. I think that, so often, we don't give adequate attention and adequate recognition to the hard work that's being done by schools that are achieving great results for diverse populations of children. And so, it's just an appropriate, almost common sense thing to try to recognize those schools that are really working hard to achieve great results.

But beyond that, I think it's really important for us to work to dispel the myths, particularly those myths about which children can't succeed. And so, when we structure recognition programs in ways that identify schools that have done a great job with all populations of children, then we send a message to educators, the community at large, that this can be done. That we can, in fact, educate all children well, because there are folks who are doing it.

And so, I think that those are among the most important reasons for us to engage in efforts to really rethink how we go about identifying and recognizing schools so that we reinforce the good things that are happening, and then we work to dispel those myths. And then finally, I would say that the other really important thing is that by recognizing these schools, it gives us the opportunity to learn from them. We get the chance to become more and more sophisticated about how schools go about doing these great things. And as we learn, we can then help other schools emulate those results.

Britt JUNG:

Thanks. Linda, I want you to take a few minutes if you'd like to talk about the work

that's going on in Virginia.

Dr. Linda WALLINGER, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction in the Virginia Department of Education:

Sure. We are in the process of developing a recognition program for schools as stated in the law, and our requirements really are founded in the law already, and I will cite from Section 1117 of the Schools Support and Recognition section of the law that says that, "schools that have made the greatest gains in closing the achievement gap and have exceeded their Adequate Yearly Progress for two or more consecutive years, should be considered for rewards and recognition."

We are actually building on a concept that is already in place, somewhat, in Virginia, and while we don't have our program up and running totally, we're trying to consolidate several ideas at one time, rather than creating different programs that have competing priorities. First of all, the National Association of State Directors for Title I already has a Distinguished School Recognition program. So, we looked at those criteria and felt like many of them were certainly things that we would want to include in our program. So rather than having dueling programs, we thought we would incorporate some of those criteria.

Another recognition program is the "No Child Left Behind" Blue Ribbon Schools program. And certainly, once again, when you look at those criteria, you think, "Gee, these are programs and criteria that we will want to emulate." A third component is building on something that we already have in place in Virginia called an academic review. Now typically, an academic review is a program that is seeking to help a struggling school. It's not one to honor a school to be recognized. But the criteria that are examined during the academic review are things that we would want to be looking at, to see that they're in place, in a school that has a recognition program.

And the four fundamental criteria that are part of the academic review are, first of all, that the curriculum within the school is aligned with the standards and the assessments that are administered. Second, that there is good use of instructional time within the school. Third, that data are used for good decision making and planning within the school. And fourth, that professional development is in place where it's needed and is really targeting the needs of students and teachers, as they address the needs of their students.

An additional thing that we have been talking about in Virginia is to make sure that the schools not only meet the criteria for Adequate Yearly Progress, but that they also meet the criteria for our own accreditation program within Virginia. And slowly, those two programs are beginning to merge together, but we want to make sure that we are focusing on schools that are fully accredited. And one of the differences is that our fully accredited system recognizes not only progress and success in reading and mathematics, but also in science, and history, and social studies.

And so as we move toward bringing science assessments into the formula for

consideration for Adequate Yearly Progress, we think that it's important to begin to recognize that concept up front. So we're thinking that the schools would not only meet the federal criteria that are outlined in the law, but also the criteria that go along with our accreditation system.

As I was preparing for this session and looking at some documents, two other things really jumped out at me that I think need to be considered, or are worthy of consideration. One is how schools that, high performing, perhaps high poverty schools that have been successful, what they have done to attract and retain high quality teachers.

It's clear from the research – and we hear this everyday in our conversations and in our dialogues with schools and researchers – that the teacher is the single most important indicator in terms of student achievement and success, perhaps after the parents, certainly in helping students learn. And so, when we look at schools that are struggling, I think we need to consider what they have in place that are enabling them to attract and maintain good teachers at the school.

And another criterion that is not specific in the other documents that we've looked at, but that I think is important, is the way these schools develop leadership capacity within the school. And when I think leadership capacity, I don't think only necessarily at the administrative level, but I think certainly among teacher leaders as well, because it's important to recognize that not one person alone is going to turn around a school. It's going to take a team of people to work in doing that.

I would cite an example at the state level. While we don't have truly a statewide system of recognition and support up and running yet, we do have an example of a... sort of a statewide program, and that's something that our Governor of Virginia, Mark Warner, initiated two years ago called the PASS Program. And it's a program that really is built around the concept of partnerships. Partnerships within the community and with businesses, but also, one of the options is to have a partnership between a struggling school and a high performing school.

And it was interesting in looking at some of the information that was prepared to initiate that program, and also some of the intermediate reports that have been prepared, because the paired school prepares quarterly reports. They make six visits a year and the Department of Education has awarded these schools, the visiting school, a grant, what's called a travel grant, for them to come and work with the schools and make some observations.

And the team consists of people at various levels, always the principal with the team leader, but there are some other teachers and other individuals on the team as well. And they are given certain assignments, but they must also submit a quarterly report, and so I was reviewing one of the quarterly reports last evening to think, what kinds of things are the paired school, is the paired school, pointing out as they come into the low performing school.

And typically, they are going to make comments about things that they observe, barriers to success, recommendations of how to improve. And then also make a comment about things that they noted last time, during the last visit, and what steps that they have taken toward making recommendations and improvement on those. And maybe in the discussion part of the program, we'll talk a little bit about some of the observations that those schools have made.

Britt JUNG:

Great. Thanks a lot. And from the district perspective, Wanda, would you like to talk about effective schools and how you use them to help your other school improvement efforts?

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Aldine Independent School District:

Sure. In Texas, of course, we've had an accountability system in place for quite some time. And, of course, we've merged it with the national accountability system, No Child Left Behind, and we have schools identified as distinguished schools, as you mentioned, through the Title Program and Title Directors across the nation.

One of the things that's been nice about having this system in place, is that we're able to recognize these schools and provide a public forum for them to begin to share their best practices. Many times, people are hesitant to ask, but one of the things that's interesting in having these two external accountability systems, it's made us realize that we have to abandon the idea of working in isolation. So having a system in place to hold these schools up, dispel the myth that it can't be done, show someone, "yes it can be done, and here are these people, these schools, doing it," has given our schools an opportunity to visit, and share, and begin to get some ideas.

The Region Service Centers provide some open forums, some panel discussions, for these schools to come and share best practices, and that sort of opens the door for people around the states to begin sharing. We use a lot of data, and of course, we use what used to be called "Just for the Kids," now National Center for Educational Accountability. And a lot of the professional development that's going on at the principal level is looking at data and looking at best practices.

In our particular district, in Aldine, we've had a culture of sharing from our previous Superintendent, Sonny Donaldson, and our current Superintendent, Nadine Kujawa. The idea is when you share, you learn. So we have shared with outside the district on numerous occasions and had lots of schools come in. But we have also, in our own efforts, had to create that culture of sharing within the district.

We use our data to identify schools with good programs, best practices. And then we've had to create that culture so that people feel comfortable picking up the phone and calling. And then we've created our meetings so that it's a time for sharing, principals

share: One principal shares a good writing program, one principal shares a good math program, and they get an opportunity to share their internal accountability systems, how they keep up with students, how they work with data, how they train teachers, and then they're able to...

We set up school visits so people can go to one school and visit, and that sort of encourages that informal picking up the phone, "What's going on in your campus," and "I'm doing this. What kinds of things are you doing in that area, so that I can learn from that or refine my complete system." And one of the things that we've realized is that every system has to be different for every campus.

So we start with those schools that have been identified as distinguished, perhaps, or through our own system in looking at good data. And then we've gone through and focused on discussions and we talk about being a professional learning committee. I think part of our community, part of what we've done with professional development is realize that our principals have to collaborate.

And I think you're right, Linda, when you say, it's not just the leadership at the top, at the administrative level, it's also the leadership for the campus level, at the principal level, the assistant principal level, and then our teachers. The leadership that they have that provides staff development so that they can have collaboration and share with other teachers and other campuses. What kinds of things are happening?

So we've set into place a lot of structures. We've changed our structures and our meeting settings so that it can be more about collaboration, more about sharing, more about opportunities for people to share and discuss so that we can begin to pass that school improvement along to other campuses who need that.

And we've done some partnerships with some other districts. Our Superintendent sits down with other school district Superintendents and they share ideas, and then we travel to visit them and see what they're doing. They come to Aldine and see what we're doing.

And it's interesting because people have said, "Well doesn't that create a lot of work for your teachers, for your campuses?" Well, it does, but one of the things that's so good about that type of work, is that in doing it, preparing it to share with other people, you are actually internalizing your processes and systems more. And I've had people tell me, "Well, once this school visited us and asked us questions, we realized we had left out an important piece. And even though we've been successful, to take it to the next level, we need to add this or we need to change this." Plus, it's a wonderful morale booster and a great affirmation of the hard work for our teachers.

So we've been able to take, sort of a trickle down effect on the things of recognition at the national, state, and local level, and try to put that into practical purposes for improving our schools in our district.

Britt JUNG:

Thank you. I've heard you both mention some of the qualities that you've come across in these schools, these successful schools, particularly how they look at data, professional development. Joe, do you – I know this has really been your life's work in trying to generalize some of these qualities; it's really tough I think, at the school level to, sometimes for school people to translate the activities into generalities in order to move them into another school. Do you want to talk about some of the other qualities that you identified in your research?

Dr. Joseph JOHNSON:

Sure. And I'll talk about it, both as research that I've done in the past, but also what we're learning in Ohio from the schools that we're identifying right now. This year we have 102 schools that we've identified as schools of promise. These are schools that serve low-income communities, but they have a very high percentage of their students demonstrating proficiency on our state assessment.

But also, they have that same very high percentage of every demographic group of students demonstrating proficiency, even when there are as few as five students in that group. So, in these schools, we just have a high level of assurance that they're doing a good job for all of the populations of students that they serve. And as we then, looking at those schools, and trying to understand what's at the root of their success, we see the same kinds of things that are in the literature about really strong schools that serve diverse populations of children.

In addition to, or maybe complementing some of the things that the two of you have said, one of the things that always just hits me so squarely when you go into these schools, is that it's clear that you see that children in these schools are being taught very challenging academic work. Even in the schools that might be serving the most impoverished community, you see a level of academic rigor that you'd be expecting to see in the most affluent schools in the community. And this, I think is a really important thing because students aren't likely to learn it if we don't teach it. And I think that part of the root of the success of these schools is that they have figured out how to teach the more challenging academic skills.

A second thing that we see in these very successful schools is they organized themselves in a way that causes them to continue learning about how to teach better and get better results. So it starts, Wanda, as you said, with looking at the data, and constantly going back and looking to see, "Well, what's going on with our students?" But then, beyond that, there are ongoing, regular conversations among teachers, among the leaders of the school, both administrative leaders, as well as teacher leaders about, "Well, how do we do better? What are these data telling us? How do we improve our instruction for these populations of children?" So that leadership activity focused on improving instruction, that continuous collaboration is an important part of the success of these schools.

Something else that we see that is so visible when you go into these schools is that there

is a clear commitment to getting each and every child to a high level of success. There isn't a sense that folks are satisfied with getting the average, to be okay. You see teachers and administrators and support staff really pushing to get every child to achieve his or her potential.

And it creates an exciting atmosphere within those schools because teachers are constantly growing, students are constantly growing, folks are convinced that somehow, they can get every child to be successful. And they say, "We're not sure exactly how we're going to get there, but we know that there's got to be a way, and we're not going to give up until we find it."

One more thing that we see is this wonderful outreach to parents in the community. In these schools, they believe in the importance of their own work as educators, in terms of getting children to achieve at high levels. But they know that if they are working in partnership with parents, that their work can be even more powerful. And so, they're constantly working to reach out to parents, and to help parents feel comfortable, and to help parents see how they can contribute to the education of their child. Even those parents who may not have a college degree, or who may not have a high school diploma, or who may not speak English, they really reach out to those parents, and they help those parents become acquainted with ways in which they can be a part of the solution.

And in the process of doing so, they give those parents hope. Sometimes parents who maybe have given up hope, or who just never had it because they perceive that school wasn't a successful experience for them, and maybe they didn't have much hope that school was going to be anything different for their child. But these schools are constantly delivering the message, "You know, your child can accomplish some really wonderful things in life, and together, we can make that happen." And that has great power.

One last thing: Within these schools, they make it such that everyone feels valued. Everyone feels like they belong. And that's a really important thing. Yeah, the curriculum is really important. High quality instruction is really important. Great leadership is really important. But, when you really boil it down, our work is a human enterprise. And if we don't relate well as human beings, then we're not going to accomplish as much.

And the researcher Ron Ferguson says many of our youth today, the message that they're trying to give us is, "before I care about how much you know, I want to know how much you care." And in these great schools, kids are constantly getting the message that their teachers, their administrators care deeply about them. They want them to succeed. And one of the ways that these schools help children know that they're cared about is that people are working so hard to make learning interesting, and fun, and exciting. They're working to make instruction connect with the backgrounds, the experiences, the cultures of the children who are there.

And so, you see very low absenteeism at these schools, both among the students and the teachers, because teachers also are excited to be in these places. They know that they are a part of a team, a part of a team that's doing something wonderful for children. So all of

those elements seem to work together in ways that generate great results for students.

Britt JUNG:

As you were talking, I hear you talk about communities that have very deep belief systems and strong commitment to their goals, and all of that strikes me as taking a lot of energy.

Dr. Joseph JOHNSON:

You bet.

Britt JUNG:

How do you translate that, or how do you generate that kind of community in a school that doesn't have it? And at the same time, how do you not overburden these schools that require so much energy to keep going, and then you ask them to try and help their fellow schools? Anybody? All of you?

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

Well, I was going to cite an example that one of our schools in Virginia cited, in terms of hosting a parent-mentoring program, to try to build exactly what you were just describing. The input from parents, and the collaboration from parents, who may be intimidated by the school, or if it's a community where there's a strong Hispanic and Limited English Population (LEP) population, parents who might not have attended American schools and aren't familiar with the circumstances. And so pairing individuals to accompany those parents to school, to parent-teacher conferences and so forth, to try to, not only generate the interest, but to increase the comfort level that these parents have as they begin to work with others.

Britt JUNG:

So is that at the district level, that parents from one school may be mentoring parents from another school?

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

Yes, exactly. But it could also be from contiguous school. I know across the country, school districts and divisions are of many different sizes and shapes, and in Virginia we have small ones and large ones as well, but this happened to be in a fairly large school division that did have multiple schools. But also pairing parents within a school, to accompany someone else from another school. So that would be one way that I think might facilitate an outreach to parents and community.

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

I think looking within the school itself, when you talk about creating the type of campus that Joe described, you go into these buildings and there is a tremendous sense, there is just tremendous focus, and almost to a point of urgency, but it's a very positive energy. The teachers have that collective efficacy that they know what they're doing is good. And I think in order to get that, I think you have to have a strong leader, who is willing to collaborate.

I think it's important for the leadership to make a concerted effort to develop the kind of climate where it is truly, "We're building a community here of learners." And in doing that, there is a certain level of expectation, but there is an incredible level of support, and an incredible outreach from the campus leadership to all the teachers so that everybody has a part in how we're going to do this. Joe said that if they talk about looking at their kids, and sometimes they say, "We don't know how we're going to do it, but we're going to do it," that there's this constant plan in motion, and constantly looking at data.

And I think we've evolved to where many people, successful schools, are beyond just the looking at data from multiple-choice tests. They're looking at student work. They're looking at different types of projects that(?)...Part of the rigor that you talked about, but also, they're sitting down and talking about what great things are happening in their classrooms and the idea that we can develop that community so that if my classroom didn't go as well with this concept as yours, that I know you're ready to reach out and show me that there's this, a system set up, so that I can come see, or there is a support, if I'm a new teacher, of a skill specialist, or someone who can come in and show me, that there's the idea that we're constantly working, we're constantly moving together.

And I think that leadership puts in lots of structures to make that happen. That there are weekly meetings where you talk about different kinds of data, different kinds of issues, and we've moved away from that just administrative kind of thing. We've got email now. We can do all that through email. But when we come together as the professionals, we're looking at that learning community. We're talking about, "What are we going to do next week and how's it going to be better than it was last year, or last week? How is that going to be different? And what kinds of things do we need to be doing for kids?"

One of the things that I think is important, and which Joe was talking about, when you go into these campuses, you walk in and talk to principals, and talk to different teachers, about how their kids are doing. And they can almost tell you down to the individual student, what we're working on, where we have gaps. And then they'll immediately say, "But this is what we've done. We're regrouping. We're restructuring. We're revisiting. We're swapping teachers. We're doing all kinds of innovative things." Like you say, we're not sure how we're going to get there, but they're constantly thinking outside the box, and everybody has their input on what that's going to be to make it happen for kids.

There is a tremendous commitment. I think we talked about the commitment and focus, but for me to have that commitment, and for me to have that focus, I have got to have a lot of opportunity for input. And I think that that's what is so important about what these

campuses and the leadership at the campuses have done. They have truly involved the teachers in setting up that plan and getting them to be a part of the daily decisions. And so it's created a community where everyone, the parents do feel like, "Everybody here is interested in my child and they can talk to me in depth about my child."

And I think it even extends, not just the teachers and the administration, the whole campus. The custodial people understand how important their role is in making sure that school is a safe and wonderful environment for kids. The food service. Everybody has a part in understanding – the front office – that this is a place where people come to learn, and it's a pleasant positive place, and we're here about business, about making sure that all kids get an opportunity to learn.

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

Building on the concept of data analysis, I think it's important too, to focus on the big picture versus the narrowing in on data. I think that lots of schools have, for a long time, been looking at data. That's not really new. Certainly in Virginia we've been looking at data and we've even been disaggregating by item analysis and so forth. But certainly with "No Child Left Behind" and the concept of subgroups now, we're taking that disaggregation down a further step. And so it allows teachers, administrators, and the school community to focus on strategies that are required to address a certain student population.

Another thing that I think is important is giving teachers the vocabulary to be able to articulate their success. So often, teachers know that they're pretty good at what they do, but when you ask them, "So how did you do that? What are you doing every day?" Not every teacher is able to exactly articulate those ideas, and share them with others, and to categorize them so that they can be replicated for future years. And I think that in the schools where we are seeing high performing students, and this discussion that you were mentioning, and the collaboration that occurs, it does enable individuals to be able to explain exactly what it is that they are doing to achieve success with students.

Dr. Joseph JOHNSON:

I think that much of what has been said in response to your question, if I can kind of focus on just a couple of key issues. One is people are more likely to generate that energy, or to develop that energy if they have a powerful goal in mind, a powerful vision of what they want their school to be. Back when I was first studying some of the successful schools in Texas, I remember one principal who said, "Well, you can't get people to go whole hog for ho-hum!"

And what that meant was that if your goals are mediocre, if people think that they're just coming to work because it's work, and all that they're going to accomplish is what has been accomplished before, it's hard to generate a lot of energy. But when people believe that they are a part of something special, when they see the goal that they're going to achieve, when it becomes clear to them, then that can be very motivating.

Something else, though, that I hear in these comments is that people have to feel like they can do this. You can have a great goal, but if you don't believe that you can accomplish it, then it's not going to generate the kinds of energy that could be created if you actually believed that you could do it. And so, in very successful schools, they manage to create the levels of support, the kind of teamwork that create that sense of efficacy, that make it such that people feel like they really can do it.

And I think that what's central to that is that teamwork, the feeling that, "I'm not in this alone," that, "I have folks who are rallying around me and working with me to achieve great results." So I think that those are maybe overarching pieces of all the things that have been discussed thus far in response to your question.

In terms of the second part of your question, though, for those schools that have already achieved the success, if we're asking them to now pair with and work with another school, does that drain some of that energy off? Well, there probably is a point at which that could happen. And so I think that it is reasonable and appropriate for us to not ask too much of those schools so that they can, as Sonny Donaldson would say, 'they have to keep the main thing, the main thing.'

But I think, at the same time, and Wanda, you've said something about this earlier, in the process of sharing with somebody else, you learn. And you get more sophisticated about what it is that's making a difference. And so I think it can actually stimulate energy as opposed to take energy away, if it's done in the right way, and if it's done in the right amounts.

In Ohio, for our Schools of Promise, we have a conference each year where we ask schools to come and present sessions to other schools, and there's an opportunity for dialogue. But then also, twice a year, we have regional events that we call forums, and in these forums, we, in essence, invite teams of folks in to come and actually visit schools. So we'll go to an area where there's a clustering of our Schools of Promise. Educators will come in. They will visit those schools in the morning, and in the afternoon, they come back, and everybody has a really rich discussion about what they saw, what they learned, and how they might go back and begin working on emulating some of the good things that they saw.

So, we've tried to find ways to promote that sharing that would be relatively easy for the schools that we're holding up as great examples.

Britt JUNG:

And without being a drain on them. Can any of you think of examples of schools that have improved, or improved at least in some of those key areas that you talked about, as a result of working with model schools, or as a result of school visits, or being in the district, or being in the state, and having those opportunities?

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

I'll go back to some examples from Virginia in the program that I mentioned earlier. When the schools are paired to work with each other, one of the focus points is to make sure that the incoming school has strengths in the areas of weakness of the receiving school. So that if there are curricular issues, or organizational, or leadership management issues, there is someone coming in to work with that school in those particular areas.

Britt JUNG:

And just so I understand, in Virginia are schools automatically paired?

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

No. This was a special initiative that was a directive of the governor called PASS.

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

One of the things that we tried to do is have district people at the district level work with successful schools, and work with schools that are not as successful, and try to help them share, give them the opportunity, in a way, so it won't be so draining on that campus. You can't send teachers out of your campus. You have your own job to do. But we have actually seen examples where, when we have tried to share these practices from one to the other, that we have made improvements in other schools.

And I was also going to add one of the things that I think is powerful about setting up the school visits. Some of the things that we've talked about today, that you see in these successful schools, you don't get it at a staff development or at a conference presentation. You don't get that feel, and that sense of community, and that focus unless you actually walk through those doors, go into classrooms, and see and hear what the kids are experiencing.

Britt JUNG:

And I think it's hard to publicly explain what it looks like to look at student work as a group of teachers unless you actually watch it.

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

Right, right. Or watch the classroom instruction and watch the level of engagement. And so I think that's why the school visits are so powerful, because people will go, "I just didn't think it could be done," to sit and listen to somebody share, the way they have a successful program function, is very different than actually watching it take place. And I think the visits are very, very powerful. And it's interesting, because we do try to set that up within the district. Sometimes that works better when you're even out of the district, going someplace else and doing it. But I think it's very important for people to be able to

see how it actually happens on a daily basis.

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

Also, in terms of thinking of whether it's a drain on the resources of the sending school for a partnership, I think it's important to remember that the target is constantly moving for improvement, and so just because a school is high performing at the current level, doesn't mean that that school doesn't have higher targets to shoot for. And all of the schools need to be learning and improving at all times. And even if we didn't have targets, according to the federal component, we still need to be working to improve.

Back to something that Joe had said earlier about the concept of feeling like you can do it. In talking with some of the principals in Virginia, there is the concept of, "This is the best school." There's certainly an attitude that's there. But I think it's important also, to recognize that schools improve on more than just attitude. And you talked about the support system that needs to be in place, and I think that gets back to the concept of professional development, and many other things along the way that teachers want to do the right thing. There are very few teachers in the classroom who have other ideas in mind. And so they want to do the right thing, but they don't always know exactly what is the right thing for that particular student population. And I think that it's important to make sure that we have concrete ideas, and schools that have high performing success, do have concrete ideas in place to work with their teachers, and provide them that support.

Britt JUNG:

And do these schools that we're talking about, the successful schools, the Schools of Promise, do they continue to grow? What I'm getting at is sustainability. That level of energy that you talk about is intense and how do these schools sustain themselves? And do they continue to grow? How do you make sure that that happens?

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

I think that gets back to the concept of building leadership capacity that we talked about earlier. That if the principal leaves, and somebody new comes in, that school still needs to be able to move forward. If the fifth grade teacher, or the high school English teacher, who was the focus of a program leaves, there need to be others left behind who are able to carry forth.

And so I think it's the idea of building sustainability, having a curriculum, having things that can be referred back to in writing, traditions, if you will, that are in place already that can be sustained and moved forward, and not just lie solely within one person, or one group of people, to be able to move forward.

Britt JUNG:

Joe, would you like to add something?

Dr. Joseph JOHNSON:

In Ohio, what we found is that many of the schools that were our Schools of Promise last year, are, in fact, Schools of Promise this year. And in a few cases, I think because we've set the bar so high, that there are schools that made it last year, and then just missed it this year. Would you say that they are no longer a good school? No, they're still a really strong school, it's just that they didn't quite meet that level of expectation.

I think when you look at data more long term, and looking at schools that have been studied nationally, you see that when we have those strong, very strong schools, such as you might find in the Aldine School District, you see many of those same schools that are strong year after year after year, and it is because of the culture of leadership, the culture of success that's been created within those schools, and in some cases, within that school district.

But we do know that cultures can change, and when you extract a few of the key leaders of that culture, and if they're not replaced with others who bring the same enthusiasm, the same willingness to work together, the same focus on the best interest of children, then things can deteriorate. And unfortunately, there are schools that were, at one time, on the right path, but somehow lost it in the change of the culture of that school.

Britt JUNG:

And would you say that that's perhaps where the district's role, the district's leadership role comes in, or possibly even the state's role?

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

I would agree, because I certainly think that we've had the same experiences that Joe has described as far as the schools, that truly had the things in place that we talked about, and truly build that capacity so that if one person leaves, a key person leaves, they have built that capacity so someone can take their place.

I think that's very important at the district level that those expectations are set up as people are considered to be assistant principals and principals, that that is part of the leadership training that they receive before they become principals. And it's very important that everybody understands that culture and that expectation, as I said, in a positive and supportive way.

Because in the schools that we have who have remained on the top, so to speak, on the distinguished list, year after year, they truly have that culture in place, and teachers have come and gone, assistant principals have come and gone, but the leadership has been in place so that that everybody understands that culture and the opportunity.

And I will tell you, in Aldine, I think that's one of the reasons that we do so much

training within and hire within. Because we are looking for the kind of people who understand the kind of culture and philosophy and determination that is expected for our kids to be successful.

Britt JUNG:

And would you... I want to give you a chance to talk about being a finalist for the BROAD Prize. Would you say that that had an impact on getting there?

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

I would certainly say that the focus that we have had on working for all students has been important in the data that the BROAD jury looked at to consider Aldine as one of the finalists, and we were very excited about that. And it was a great learning opportunity, because we learned from the schools, and the school district, who did win. That, yes, that is certainly part of the culture that we have tried to build that had an impact on us being one of the finalists.

Britt JUNG:

And one of five finalists, right? Congratulations.

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

Thank you.

Britt JUNG:

Can I ask you, what do you think are suitable rewards for schools? Is it recognition? Is recognition enough? The law talks about how you may use funds to award schools. Can you talk about what you've thought about in your states or districts?

Dr. Joseph JOHNSON:

I think that what's most important is that we engage in the process of identifying these schools, and putting them forward in the public light, and helping other educators and helping communities know about them. I think that is an award that is so well-deserved. If we find ways to do financial rewards or other types of rewards, I think that that can be positive. I think that we need to be careful about how we do that.

Britt JUNG:

And I think the high functioning environments that you described really relates to, Linda, what you talked about with attracting and retaining high quality staff. We know that's more important, many times, than extra money for teachers and staff.

Dr. Linda WALLINGER:

Certainly the law allows us to use some funds for rewards to schools. I will add a little bit, in terms of rewarding schools and teachers, one of the concepts that we have discussed – and we don't have anything in place just yet either – but would be to give a reward, a sum of money to a school, either to serve as a model school, as we were talking, and perhaps pair to, what I mentioned earlier, travel grants to work with another school.

But also, something that we've been using for a different initiative within the state, but perhaps would be applicable here, is to give -- Every school can always use some additional resources, and I don't necessarily mean instructional materials. It might be the ability to hire somebody to relieve teachers of some of their responsibilities, or to give them more time.

When you talk to teachers, and I talk to some of the school divisions in Virginia. They said the thing we need the most is time. I mean, money would be nice, and higher pay, and all of those things would be nice, but really to achieve the goals that we have at hand, time to collaborate, time to plan, and so it would be an interesting concept to perhaps, give an award to a school, with the idea that it would be used to somehow create more time. And, you know, school personnel are very creative. We can come up with ideas, but my guess is that they come up with ideas on their own, of how that might be used to reward the school as a whole.

In terms of rewarding the leadership, per se, I agree with you. I think there are pros and cons. Most good leaders are going to say, "I'm reaping the benefits because the faculty and staff at that school did all the work. I might be sitting at the head of the school, and might be the person receiving the certificate of recognition, but it's not I who did all of the work." And so I think in terms of rewarding, too, it's important to look at rewarding the school as a whole, and not just a few individuals within the school.

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

We actually have an incentive plan for every employee in the district.

Britt JUNG:

Is that a district plan?

Dr. Wanda BAMBERG:

It's a district plan. It's not a state plan. And it does include, at the school level, the state, and national accountability systems and schools, individuals, principals, assistants, counselors, diagnosticians, everyone receives, if they meet all the criteria, they do receive money as part of that incentive. And not just for the school. It's individual and it's in the check, you might say. So we do have that, but I will add, that these people in these

schools who have been successful were there long before the incentive was in place, and would continue to do so, because the money is not such a tremendous amount that it's going to make a huge lifestyle change. It's really, sort of, it is a form of recognition.

Britt JUNG:

I really thank you all for coming today and sharing this conversation and I know it was no small feat to get here and to make it happen, so we really appreciate it. I hope that those who are listening or watching, I hope that we prompted them to think about how they will create Academic Achievement Rewards Programs in their states and Distinguished Schools Programs in their states. And hopefully, if they keep their eye on that, then the compliance will have well worth the effort. And it's been a pleasure to talk about so many positive things going on in your states and thank you again for coming.

PANELISTS:

Thank you.